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ABSTRACT

The study measures student attitudes toward certain subject matter and teaching methods in the social studies. Three hundred ninety-one seventh and eighth graders from suburban and rural areas of Cherokee County, Georgia, participated in the study. Two rating scales were developed from responses to an open-ended questionnaire which asked students to list their likes and dislikes about social studies. The two rating scales, containing eight and ten items each, were administered to the students. Item format was a statement, such as, "I like social studies when the study of current events is emphasized in class." Students marked agreement or disagreement on a scale of one to five. Analysis of responses shows that, in terms of content, students prefer social geography, social history, current events, and culturally-oriented areas of social studies. In terms of methodology, students prefer discussion type classes, films and filmstrips, interesting and readable texts, and no homework. The author points out that educators should not make curriculum and methods decisions based on student preference only, but he does believe results of student surveys such as this should be taken into consideration. (AV)

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Student Interest in Social Studies
Content and Methodology

by

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Introduction

At any historical time period, teachers in the United States have been confronted with the advice to adopt different methodology and new subject matter for their teaching. This has been especially true for social studies teachings in the 1960's and the 1970's. The "new" social studies of the 1960's advocated an inquiry approach and much use of simulation. During the 1960-1970 period, there re-emerged a greater emphasis in student-centered rather than teacher-centered classrooms. During the same period emphasis came for a change in the subject matter of the social studies to include more study of the behavioral sciences and economics. Also certain groups -- notably ethnic and racial minorities and women -- demanded that their background be treated more fairly in the social studies curricular offerings. Another trend of the 1970's, and one that sometimes is seen as being in contradiction to some of the demands for innovation in methodology and new curricular materials, has been the demand for teacher accountability, student accountability, and a return to the basics.

As teachers and school administrators are aware of these and other trends in the teaching of social studies, they must reexamine their teaching methods, materials, and subject matter content. Certainly the literature and the thinking of recognized authority persons in social studies give one indication for planning of teaching methods and subject matter content. Another source of information might

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be the attitudes students have toward methodology and subject matter. However, a review of the literature concerning students' interest in social studies reveals that most studies in this area have been concerned with curriculum choice and not with the likes or dislikes of particular methods of content materials for particular social studies courses. For example, Witty (1961) did a study concerning pupils' interest in high school of vocational and education interest and found that the subject liked best were the ones in which the best grades were made. Some studies such as McTeer, Blanton and Lee (1975) and McTeer (1975) show that boys express a higher interest in social studies than do girls when social studies are compared with the areas of English, mathematics, and science.

While the subject matter content of the curriculum and the methodology used for teaching this subject matter content should not be completely determined by student interest and student wishes, nevertheless student interest should be one determining factor in selecting curriculum content and methodology. This study attempted to measure student attitude toward certain areas of social studies content and certain methodology for teaching the social studies.

Procedures

The 391 subjects for the study were students chosen at random from the seventh and eighth grades of Woodstock Elementary School and the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades of Cherokee High School. Both of these schools are in Cherokee County, Georgia. Cherokee County is on the fringe of metropolitan Atlanta. The students from the southern end of the county represent a somewhat suburban population while the students from the northern end of the county represent a somewhat rural population. The students in both schools used for the study represent a blend of both rural and urban students.

An open-ended questionnaire was given to the entire seventh and eighth grade

students of Woodstock Elementary School and the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade students of Cherokee High School. These students were asked to list their likes and dislikes concerning the social studies. From these responses, and from a review of the literature, an instrument consisting of eight items dealing with social studies curriculum content and ten items dealing with methodology was constructed. This was the instrument administered to the 391 students used in the study. These students were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement using these responses: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = no opinion, 4 = disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree. The statements dealing with social studies content were:

1. I like the study of social studies because in history one mostly studies the wars and the lives of great men.
2. I like the study of social studies because in history one learns about how people lived in the past and about their religion, literature, and art.
3. I like the study of social studies because in geography one studies about the different areas, landforms, and climates of the world along with the study of maps including latitude and longitude.
4. I like the study of social studies because in geography one studies the people of the other countries, their culture and how the geography of their country affects their culture.
5. I like the study of social studies because in economics one learns how to manage one's own money and sees how our society operates on the free enterprise system.
6. I like the study of social studies because one studies the different groups of people in our society and different lifestyles of these groups.
7. I like the study of social studies because in the study of government one studies the laws and the structure of local, state and federal governments and how these laws and governments relate to the individual.
8. I like social studies when the study of current events is emphasized in class.

The ten items dealing with social studies methodology were:

1. I like social studies because the classes are mostly lecture with note taking and very little discussion.

2. I like social studies because the classes are mostly discussion and have little lecture.
3. I like social studies because the classes consist mostly of independent and group projects.
4. I like social studies because the classes have films and filmstrips.
5. I like social studies because of the games and puzzles that are played in class.
6. I like social studies when the textbook is interesting, informative, and readable.
7. I like social studies' tests that are a combination of matching, multiple choice, short answer, and a small amount of discussion.
8. I like social studies tests that only consist of discussion questions.
9. I like social studies when the work is done in class and there is no homework.
10. I like social studies because oral reports are given in class.

For each statement, a tally was made of the number of responses given for each level of agreement. In order to determine a comparative rating of the statements, a score for each statement was computed by giving a weight of 2 for strongly agree, 1 for agree, 0 for no opinion, - 1 for disagree, and - 2 for strongly disagree. Table I gives these scores and relative ratings for the statements dealing with social studies content.

TABLE I

Scores and Relative Ranking of
Statements Concerning Social Studies Content

<u>Statement</u>	<u>Concept</u>	<u>Score</u>	<u>Relative Ranking</u>
1	Military-Political History	152	5
2	Social History	287	1
3	Physical Geography	- 12	8
4	Social Geography	210	4
5	Economics	65	7
6	Sociology	260	2
7	Government	154	6
8	Current Events	237	3

Table II gives these scores and relative ranking for the statements dealing with methodology.

TABLE II
Scores and Relative Ranking of
Statements Concerning Methodology

Statement	Concept	Score	Relative Ranking
1	Lecture	- 285	9
2	Discussion	234	5
3	Independent and Group Projects	25	6
4	Films and Filmstrips	277	4
5	Games and Puzzles	8	7
6	Textbooks	415	2
7	Combination Type Tests	412	3
8	Discussion Tests	- 396	10
9	No Homework	593	1
10	Oral Reports	- 166	8

Conclusions and Discussion

In regard to student interest expressed in the various areas of the social studies, the data reveal:

1. There is a definite difference in the students' expressed interest in physical geography and the interest expressed in social geography. Students have a greater interest in social geography than in physical geography.
2. Regarding military-political history and social history, students expressed a greater interest in social history.
3. Students expressed a high interest in current events. This may indicate a high interest in the present.
4. Economics is viewed by students as having low student interest.
5. Students expressed a greater interest in those social studies areas that are culturally oriented than they did for the non-culturally oriented areas. This is evinced by the higher interest expressed in social history, social geography, and sociology and the lesser interest expressed for military-political history and physical geography.

In regard to students' expressed interest in various methodology, the data shows:

1. Students prefer discussion type classes more than lecture type classes. They express a negative interest in lecture classes.
2. In regard to testing, students expressed a negative interest in discussion tests. They have a far greater liking for tests that are a combination of various types of test items with only a few discussion items.
3. Student expressed a liking for methodology that uses films and filmstrips.
4. If textbooks are interesting and readable, students expressed a high

interest in methodology which uses textbooks.

5. Students expressed a negative interest in methodology that uses oral reports. This may be because the student does not wish to gather information for his/her report, or it may be because students find it boring to listen to other students' reports.
6. As probably expected, students expressed a liking for classes that have no homework.

Although student interest and attitude should not be the sole determining factor for curriculum content and methodology choices, it is a factor that should be considered. If students in Cherokee County, Georgia, are typical of students throughout the United States, social studies teachers should examine the reasons for social studies course content that is not culturally oriented, the use of teaching that is largely lecture, the use of student's oral reports, and the use of discussion-type tests.

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